

## **Strengthening Ethnic and Religious Harmony: in the Pluralist Multicultural Society of West Kalimantan**

*By Moh. Haitami Salim*

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It is a reality that we are living in the midst of diversity of the community. Moreover, as a country with various ethnic groups, Indonesia is famous for its diversity, ranging from ethnicity, race, origin, ancestry, religion, language, custom, to the level of education, social and economic backgrounds. Just imagine this country, which now has a population of more than 200 million, is made up of hundreds and even thousands of ethnic groups, more than 525 languages and dialects spreading over approximately 17,800 large and small islands, stretching along 5,150 km between the continents of Asia and Australia, and between the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean at the equator.

Similarly, as the fourth largest province after Irian Jaya, Central Kalimantan and East Kalimantan, West Borneo has an area of 146,807 kilometers square with a population of diverse ethnic groups and religions. Moh. Haitami Salim, in his book *Strengthening Ethnic and Religious Harmony*, realized that diversity in West Kalimantan deserves special attention. This is because the diversity of the community in this province is potential for conflict to occur (p. 73), as warned by Samuel P. Huntington in his works *clash of civilization*, regarding the potential clash between ethnic groups, religions, and civilizations. This is because the potential of diversity has two sides, or in other words has two opposite faces: one as the “uniting” force and the other as the “divider”.

The events of communal conflicts in West Kalimantan, for example, were caused by what Moh. Haitami Salim called the dividing factor between groups (p. 73). It was recorded that at least there have been 12 events of ethnic conflicts in West Kalimantan, between 1963 to 1999 with a great loss of property and human lives.

The intensity of each conflict varies, four of which were large-scale riots, i.e. between people of Chinese descent and Dayaks in 1967, between Dayaks and Madurese in Samalantan in 1996/1997, and between Malays and Madurese in Sambas District in 1998/1999. The latter even led to the expulsion of a certain ethnic group from the region. The impacts of the conflicts were felt up to now because they were unresolved. This phenomenon indicates the high

possibility of conflict involving ethnic groups in West Kalimantan (p. iv). If not carefully handled, this sort of conflict can lead to religious conflicts. (pp. 29). The conflict that took place last year between a religious organization and a certain ethnic group in Pontianak has presumably proved this perspective.

In his book published by Bulan Sabit Press, Moh. Haitami Salim argued the importance of upholding the principles of life in the middle of plural society, in particular for Muslims: *first*, the principle of the brotherhood; This principle should be inherent in any society, that we are all brothers that originate and descend from the same ancestors, as indicated in the verses of the Qur'an especially in Ar-Rum: 20, An-Nisa': 1, and Al-Hujurat: 13. *Second*, the principle of seeking equality; The Quran teaches and encourages us to constantly look for similarities in diversity including the religious pluralism as mentioned in Ali Imran: 64. *Third*, the principle of respect for differences. In this principle, differences must be seen as the grace, power and will of God, and thus it becomes a duty to respect and appreciate them. Respect and appreciation will bring us to getting to know each other and conduct good deeds as described in the verses above. The Qur'an also teaches that we are not allowed to mock each other as described in Al-Hujurat: 11. *Fourth*, the principle of keeping the faith and worship. This principle must be exercised by all followers of religions, that belief (*aqidah*) and religious rituals should not be mixed up, because they should be treated as something very personal as described in Al-Kafirun: 1-6. *Fifth*, the principle helping each other; with this principle, all common problems can be overcome together with mutual help. The Quran recommends that we help each other in terms of good deeds and love. *Sixth*, the principle of avoiding negative presumption; The Quran also teaches that we should not necessarily have prejudice on others or find fault in others as well as gossiping about others. The Quran suggests that doing this is like eating the flesh of your dead brother Al-Hujurat: 12 (pp. 29-31).

Diversity, differences, plurality, and various other similar terms are part of social reality that is inevitable in the course of life in the world. It is an inevitability that cannot be denied and part of the law and will of God the Almighty, and will not change forever. Its existence will continue to fill up the pages of history of mankind.

The book written by Dr. H. Moh. Haitami Salim, M.Ag who currently serves as Director of the Graduate School of STAIN Pontianak is basically a collection of papers he delivered in various seminars, dialogs, and so forth.

The book is divided into three parts: *first*, a discussion on the Insights of Pluralism and Multiculturalism in West Kalimantan Society; *second*, the religious and socio-cultural issues and the events of conflicts in West

Kalimantan; and *third*, the strategic role of religious figures and inter-religious institutions in West Kalimantan.

Finally, it can be said that the book consisting of 194 pages objectively presents the circumstances of West Kalimantan as an intellectual endeavor of the author, Dr. H. Moh. Haitami Salim, to maintain peace in West Kalimantan. Therefore, the book *Strengthening Ethnic and Religious Harmony in the Pluralist Multicultural Society of West Kalimantan* can enrich enthusiasts of pluralism or multiculturalism studies, particularly in the context of West Kalimantan. \*\*\*